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**NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY**

**JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE**

**JOINT ADVANCED WARFARE SCHOOL**



**DETERRENCE AND ENGAGEMENT: A BLENDED STRATEGIC APPROACH  
TO A RESURGENT RUSSIA**

**By**

**Craig Nieman**

*Lieutenant Colonel, United States Air Force*

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TO A RESURGENT RUSSIA**

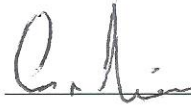
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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.**

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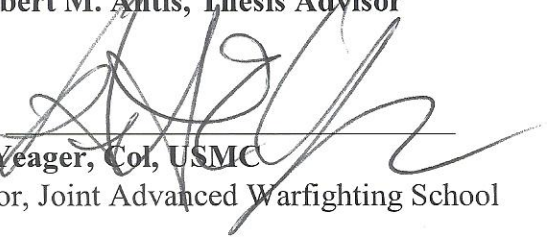
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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the last decade, Russia's increased aggression towards its neighbors has raised concerns over the stability of the European continent. Cyber denial attacks on Estonia, war against Georgia, annexation of the Crimean peninsula, and the support to rebels in Ukraine's Donbass region have all come during Vladimir Putin's watch. With Putin firmly in control of Russia after having eliminated much of his political opposition, the world asks, what are his motivations and what comes next?

Contemporary reactions to Russian aggression advance the notion that the U.S. and its NATO allies should diplomatically and economically isolate Russia while increasing the alliances' hard power projection to contain and deter further aggression. This strategic approach represents an extreme pendulum swing that is a polar opposite of the U.S.'s 2009 approach to 'Reset' relations with Russia by engaging diplomatically while reducing military strength. By applying an analysis of Russian strategic culture and national interests, this thesis offers that instead of replacing engagement and disarmament with isolation and containment, a blended solution of both deterrent strength and engagement would achieve better results in line with U.S. national interests.

## **DEDICATION**

**This work is dedicated to my family who patiently endured months of my focus on a singular subject that did not involve sports, Legos, or home improvement.**

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION – THE RISE OF RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

Over the last decade, Russia's increased aggression towards its neighbors has raised fears for the continued stability of the European continent. During this time, Russia has conducted cyber-warfare in a 2007 dispute involving ethnic Russians in Estonia. It has engaged in cyber and conventional war against Georgia in 2008 and continues to occupy disputed territories inside that sovereign nation. In 2014, Russia occupied and annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula while that nation was in the turmoil of a revolution and is suspected of continuing to support a rebellion in Ukraine's Donbass region in the east.<sup>1</sup> Most recently, Russia has deployed troops and aircraft into Syria to prop up a failing ally.

Many of Russia's aggressive actions are at odds with the U.S., its NATO allies, and their common interests. All of these actions have occurred while Vladimir Putin has been the President or Prime Minister of Russia. President Putin is leveraging Russian Nationalism to help achieve his strategic goals, which may include designs for a new Russian Empire. He is also using the tensions with NATO as an excuse to consolidate his domestic power and extend his personal reign as Russia's leader. The most recent showdowns with the West over Ukraine and then again in Syria, have enabled him to sustain his approval rating at greater than 80% since January of 2014.<sup>2</sup> Since Russia has redefined presidential terms from 4 to 6 years, Putin can leverage that popular support to

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Spokesperson U.S. Department of State, "Russia's Continuing Support for Armed Separatists in Ukraine and Ukraine's Efforts Toward Peace, Unity, and Stability." *DOS Diplomacy in Action*, July 14, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/07/229270.htm> (accessed Jan 4, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Birnbaum, Michael, "Putin's approval ratings hit 89 percent, the highest they have ever been" *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/06/24/putins-approval-ratings-hit-89-percent-the-highest-theyve-ever-been/> (accessed Sep 15, 2015).

potentially remain in control of Russia as the President until at least 2024, if not beyond.<sup>3</sup> As he proved from 2008-2012, he may still remain in control of Russia indefinitely by taking the role of Prime Minister in between Presidential terms.

Ultimately, it is likely that the U.S. will be dealing with Putin as the leader of Russia for the foreseeable future. What makes him a most dangerous opponent is that he has slowly eliminated much of his political opposition, and has the support of an ever thinning elite class.<sup>4</sup> Putin has consolidated power within what was hoped to be a budding democracy and has slowly steered it closer towards a more traditional Russian autocracy. By doing so, Putin has gained a wider latitude to take these aggressive actions, allowing him to achieve both his personal desire for power and the restoration of Russian international prestige.

Contemporary reactions to Russian aggression advance the notion that the U.S. and its NATO allies should diplomatically and economically isolate Russia while increasing the alliances' hard power projection to contain and deter further aggression.<sup>5</sup> This strategic approach represents an extreme pendulum swing that is a polar opposite of the U.S. administration's 2009 approach to 'Reset' relations between the U.S. and Russia by engaging diplomatically and reducing military strength. An analysis of Russian strategic culture and national interests will reveal that instead of replacing engagement

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<sup>3</sup> Sefenov, Mike, "Russian presidential term extended to 6 years" *CNN*, Dec 22, 2008. <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/12/30/russia.presidential.term.extension/> (accessed Sep 15, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Dawisha, Karen, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 321.

<sup>5</sup> Carafano and others, "U.S. Comprehensive Strategy Toward Russia." *Heritage Foundation*, December 9, 2015. <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/12/us-comprehensive-strategy-toward-russia> (accessed January 25, 2016).

and disarmament with isolation and containment, a blended solution of both deterrent strength and engagement would achieve better results in line with U.S. national interests.

### Thesis

Russian President Vladimir Putin is seeking to revise the international status quo and challenge the United States' dominant international position. To do this, Putin seeks recognition of Russia as a great power in a multi-polar world no longer dominated by the United States and western international organizations. He also desires an increase in Russian power and prestige by re-establishing Russian dominance over former Soviet states and historical spheres of influence. Russia is vigorously engaging nations and international organizations where the U.S. and its allies are weak to achieve gains in national power. These gains continue to be at the expense of western interests, the NATO Alliance, and stability in Europe. Therefore, the United States must change its strategic approach to Russia and show its strength as a deterrent, with a synergized application of Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic instruments of power, to prevent further Russian aggression, while also reassuring Russia that it can still achieve its strategic goals that positively contribute to the international environment.

### Methodology

In Marcel Van Herpen's *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, written and published in 2014 prior to the Russian incursions in Ukraine, the author correctly predicts the continuation of Russia's antagonistic actions on its periphery, beyond the 2008 War with Georgia. In the final concluding words of the book, Van Herpen uncannily foresees a scenario that "if Ukraine were to opt for deeper integration into the European Union, a Georgian scenario could not be excluded, in which the

Kremlin could provoke riots in Eastern Ukraine or the Crimea, where many Russian passport holders live. This would offer Russia a pretext for intervention in Ukraine to ‘protect its nationals’ and dismember the country.”<sup>6</sup> The author’s great accuracy in his projection is attributable to his analysis of Russian strategic culture and a study of Russia’s national strategy as it previously applied to their Chechen and Georgian Wars.

This thesis will seek similar insights by defining Russia’s strategic culture and the importance it plays in reaching a better understanding of our adversary. It will explore the Russian history that has helped shape this common identity and form the interests of the Russian people. The work will review the history of Putin’s rise to power inside of this culture and the methods he has used to maintain his position of leadership, in an effort to reveal his strategic goals. With this framework in place, the paper will leverage Harry Yarger’s *The Strategic Appraisal* to explore Russia’s current military doctrine and national security documents in an effort to define their national interests and national security strategy. It will then apply Graham Allison’s three conceptual frameworks for analyzing foreign policy to question the Russian Federation’s recent actions in Syria and determine if these activities conform with Russia’s strategic documents. With a comprehensive consideration of Russia’s national interests and strategy in place, the paper will seek to identify friction points where Russian strategy could lead to future conflicts with the U.S. and/or its allies. The thesis will then weigh a theory of deterrence, as defined by Thomas Christiansen in *The Contemporary Security Dilemma* and dissect two deterrent efforts, the Korean War and the Cuba missile crisis to provide salient points on both unsuccessful and successful deterrence. It will then reveal applications of this

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<sup>6</sup> Van Herpen, Marcel H, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 247.

deterrence theory that could serve to deter Russia from pursuing aggressive behaviors that conflict with the U.S. and its allies, while encouraging Russia to pursue national interests that are mutually beneficial to itself and the U.S. The paper will make conclusive national policy and strategy proposals for the application of U.S. instruments of national power using DIME as the framework for a synergized U.S. strategic approach to shape the Russian resurgence in the international community.

## CHAPTER 2: RUSSIAN HISTORY AND STRATEGIC CULTURE

Jack Snyder's 1977 work, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options*, provides a definition for strategic culture as a 'set of semi-permanent elite beliefs, attitudes, and behavior patterns' that provide a lens through which policy makers view security developments"<sup>1</sup> Later it was noted by Eitelhuber, that a "state's strategic culture defines the basic foreign policy goals and objectives that are to be pursued and shapes elite and public perceptions of the international environment."<sup>2</sup> Late 20<sup>th</sup> century International Relations and Strategy theorist, Colin Gray, succinctly describes strategic culture as "modes of thought and action with respect to force...and... national historic experiences, national aspirations, and geostrategic circumstances."<sup>3</sup> In summary, a better understanding of a nation's strategic culture can translate into a better comprehension of why a state, i.e., Russia, takes certain actions in the modern geostrategic environment. When this analysis of strategic culture is compared with a nation's strategic documents it could further help indicate if a nation's desired ends are enduring, therefore core national interests and less likely to be compromised on, or if they are perhaps more malleable.

### Autocracy and Expansionism

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles." –Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*.

An analysis of Russia's history suggests that when it comes to Russian strategic culture, themes of imperialism, expansionism, and autocracy are as much a norm for the

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<sup>1</sup>Snyder, Jack, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Option* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1977), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Eitelhuber, Norbert, "The Russian Bear: Russian Strategic Culture and What it Implies for the West." *The Quarterly Journal* Winter (2009), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Farrell, Theo, "Strategic Culture and American Empire." *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 25:2 (2005), 3.

Russian people, as democracy and freedom are for Americans. These differences trace back to the disparate security environments in which these two nations were formed. The United States has enjoyed a relatively secure environment through its short history. Moments of war in the homeland merely punctuated the perpetual peace and security that two vast oceans and minimally threatening border nations provided. On the other hand, Russia has endured numerous foreign invasions throughout the centuries. The threats have come from every side, whether they were Teutonic Knights invading from the West, Muslim Arabs from the south, or Mongol Hordes from the east.<sup>4</sup> It is pertinent to recall that the more recent and devastating invasions have also come from the west: the French, Prussians, and Germans. Russians suffered extraordinary casualties during the last world war, with estimates of over 25 million military and civilians killed.<sup>5</sup> An environment of relentless war and casualty, punctuated by periodic peace, provides an explanation for Russia's perpetual focus on security. Because of this insecurity, Russians are accustomed to giving up many more of their liberties for the greater good of the state. This greater sacrifice of freedoms ensured a strong state that was capable of providing greater security against these frequent attacks of foreign invaders.<sup>6</sup>

Russian autocratic rulers have often tapped into this cultural insecurity, while using Russian nationalism, Pan-Slavism, and Christian Orthodoxy as pretexts for further territorial expansion.<sup>7</sup> “An exemplification for this mindset is Tsarina Catherine the

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<sup>4</sup> Billington, James H., *The Icon and The Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1970), 4-22.

<sup>5</sup> Krivosheev, G. I., *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses* (London: Greenhill, 1997)

<sup>6</sup> Billington, *The Icon and The Axe*; p 4-22.

<sup>7</sup> Van Herpen, Marcel H., *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 38-39. Pan Slavism is described as a tribal nationalism that always insisted its own people were surrounded by a world of enemies and they are one against all because fundamental differences exist between these people and all others. This is exemplified as early as 1841 in conservative slavophile Stepan Shevyrev's complaint that the west expresses its aversion of Slavs and Russians at every

Great's famous dictum: I have no way to defend my borders but to extend them.”<sup>8</sup>

Territorial expansion had become the norm in Russia between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, so much so, that on average, the nation added territory the size of the modern Netherlands every year for over 150 years.<sup>9</sup> The Soviet regime also tapped into this cultural norm, briefly adding the spread of communist ideals as a fourth pretext. However, in his memoirs, George Kennan wrote, regarding the Soviets and Stalin's expansion, that “it would be useful to the western world to realize that despite all the vicissitudes by which Russia has been afflicted since August 1939, the men in the Kremlin have never abandoned their faith in that program of territorial and political expansion which had once commended itself so strongly to Tsarist diplomatists.”<sup>10</sup>

### Christian Orthodoxy

Another of these pretexts used for Russian expansion, Christian Orthodoxy, traces its roots back to 1453 and the fall of Constantinople. At this point, Russia became the only Orthodox country left in the world.<sup>11</sup> By the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Russian Tsars slowly incorporated Orthodoxy more and more into their regimes. The Tsars began to see themselves as the defender of the faith, using Orthodoxy as a basis for legitimization of their rule and as an integral part of the state control mechanism. It was at this time that Nicholas I's (1825-1855) deputy minister of public education, Sergey Uvarov, “coined

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opportunity. This is again expressed in the modern age by Russian Pan Slavist Nikolay Danilevsky in his 2010 complaint from Rossiya I Evropa (Russia and Europe), that Europe doesn't recognize the Russians as equals. That everything Russian and Slav is despicable.

<sup>8</sup> Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Gray, Colin S., “The Geopolitics of the Nuclear Era: Heartlands, Rimlands, and the Technological Revolution.” *Strategy Paper* No. 30, National Strategic Information Center, Inc. (Crane, Russak & Company, inc, 1977), 35.

<sup>10</sup> Kennan, George, *Memoirs 1925-1950* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 519.

<sup>11</sup> Billington, *The Icon and The Axe*, 3-15. Notably, Russia's ties to the lands in modern Ukraine trace back as the entry point for Christian Orthodoxy into the Russian culture and to Kiev being one of those key cities of early Russia.



the ideological triad, Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationhood.”<sup>12</sup> Thus Orthodoxy became an integral part of achieving both internal and external security. Priests were paid by the state and a clerical head of church position was established at the right hand of the Tsar. Externally, the unification of the Orthodox faith became the banner call for Russia’s southern expansion into the Ottoman Empire. In this territory, Greeks, Bulgarians, Romanians, and Serbs all shared the Orthodox faith but were ruled by the weakening Islamic Ottoman Empire. It is during this campaign against the Ottomans that Russia once again found itself facing some familiar western nations that had concerns over the growing power of Russia in that region. France, and eventually Britain, joined the Ottomans in a campaign against Russia by laying siege to Sevastopol and the Crimean Peninsula in the Crimean War.<sup>13</sup> The important role Orthodoxy played in historical Russia’s association with security, rule legitimation, and expansionism remains pertinent today. “Under Putin, priests have become fixtures in the military, schools, and other public institutions...[and] the Russian Orthodox Church [is witnessing a reemergence] as the spiritual generator of public policy and the ideological bulwark of the state.”<sup>14</sup>

### Pan Slavism and Nationalism

The last major pretext for expansion, Pan Slavism, rose to preeminence as a state mechanism in Russia around the end of the Crimean War. Originally a liberal democratic movement, Pan Slavists quickly embraced autocratic rule for two reasons. The first was that there simply was “not enough support in Russian society for liberal-democratic

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<sup>12</sup> Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars*, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 32-34.

<sup>14</sup> Weir, Fred, “Czarist Echo? Russian Orthodox Church drives to restore its political clout.” *The Christian Scientist Monitor*, Jan 4, 2016. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2016/0104/Czarist-echo-Russian-Orthodox-Church-drives-to-restore-its-political-clout> (accessed Jan 4, 2016).

ideas... and [the second] that the task of unifying all Slavs was considered more important than democratic reforms. A strong and autocratic Russia was thought the best guarantee to liberate the oppressed ‘brother peoples’ in southern Europe from the Ottoman rule.”<sup>15</sup> As with Orthodoxy and the many ethnic movements of the day, the theme of Pan Slavist identity continued to foment in Russia. It reached intense levels by 1891 under Alexander III and continued to develop during the reign of Nicholas II as it morphed further into ethnic Russian nationalism. Nicholas’ policies supporting Russian nationalism pointed to a growing repression of non-Russians, and “led to a process of enforced Russification in Poland and the Baltic Provinces, where the national languages were suppressed and assimilation was imposed.”<sup>16</sup> This enforced Russification by the Tsars and then again during the Soviet era, underpins the modern tension that many peripheral nations have with modern calls for Pan-Slavism or Russian nationalism. In aggregate, Russia’s strategic cultural exhibits realism in its external and internal behaviors by which national interests, sovereignty, independence, self-reliance, and force play major roles.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars*, 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Igumnova, Lyudmila, “Russia’s Strategic Culture Between American and European Worldviews.” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Vol 24, Issue 2 (2011), 254-273.

### CHAPTER 3: PUTIN'S RISE AND CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

With an understanding of how the themes of security, expansionism, autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationalism help define Russia's strategic culture, the rise of Putin into this realm is easier to explain. Putin was a low-level KGB agent operating in Eastern Germany when the Soviet Union collapsed. As member of the Soviet apparatus, at some level he believed the façade that the nation was successful, powerful, and wealthy. It had profound problems, but these could be solved by such a great nation. With the union in collapse, Putin returned to his home city of St. Petersburg and soon found a transformational place in Mayor Anatoly Sobchak's 1989 administration as an assistant.<sup>1</sup> "The 1990's saw [St. Petersburg] dominated by mafia groups who quickly corrupted the city's culture... [The city] acquired a reputation as the 'bandits' capital' after a string of high-profile murders... This is the environment that made Putin believe that Russia needs strong state power and must have it."<sup>2</sup> Unemployment was sky high, poverty was on the rise, and the threat of famine was growing. Corruption was rampant as the former state controlled economy entered privatization and ended up in the hands of a few. Putin's experiences in this environment shaped his view on the demise of the Soviet Union and failure of liberal democracy.<sup>3</sup>

In 1996, Sobchak lost his mayoral election and the new regime later accused him of corruption. Putin refused to work for the incoming mayor and allegedly helped Sobchak flee to France to avoid charges. His loyalty and capability quickly caught the attention of the Yeltsin administration which had just won national re-election in 1996,

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<sup>1</sup> Judah. Ben, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell in and Out of Love with Vladimir Putin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 10-19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 12.

despite Yeltsin's promise not to run and his single digit approval ratings leading up to the election.<sup>4</sup> The country continued on its economic downward spiral until it eventually reached bottom in April, 1998, and Russia defaulted on its IMF loan. At this point, disorder characterized the Russian democracy, which helped usher in a more authoritarian rule that was palatable to the populace, as long as it brought order.<sup>5</sup>

In 1998, President Yeltsin had his fifth heart attack and continued to appear even more intoxicated and out of control at his international and national appearances. The elite went in search of a new candidate that they could control. As the head of the FSB at the time, Putin was an appealing candidate for each "part of the elite; he was ex-KGB, worked for democratic Sobchak, had shown himself to be loyal, and had shown himself able to lead."<sup>6</sup> Putin became Prime Minister in late 1999 and rode into the presidency on a surge of public approval stemming from the newly launched second Chechen War. His inaugural manifesto, in December, 1999, announced the aim of Putinism:

"Russia was and will remain a great power... This is preconditioned by the inseparable characteristics of its geopolitical, economic, and cultural existence. They have determined the mentality of the Russian people and the policy of the government throughout the history of Russia and they cannot but do so at present"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Judah, *Fragile Empire*, 23-34. According to Ben Judah's interview with Boris Berezovsky in *Fragile Empire*, Berezovsky made his fortune in Russia in the 1990's as the country went through privatization. He became part of the Boris Yeltsin inner circle as a billionaire owner of the country's main television station, Channel One. In his interview he describes the consolidation of former state assets into the hands of a few super elites as political favor in exchange for loyalty to Yeltsin and assistance in assuring his re-election. Berezovsky claims to have chosen Putin as Yeltsin's successor, but later became an open critic of Putin's policies as Putin steered Russia towards authoritarianism. This culminated in Berezovsky's resignation from the Duma in the spring of 2000. Later his media channel criticized Putin's handling of the submarine Kursk accident and not soon after, numerous corruption charges that had been dropped, resurfaced, and Berezovsky fled to Britain. His media assets were taken over in 2001 by the state. He became vocal opponent of Putin, accusing him of committing war crimes in Chechnya, staging the 1999 Moscow apartment bombings as a terror attack, and suppressing freedom of speech. He was later found dead, hanging in his home in Britain 8 months after the interview.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 35.

Putin was welcomed as the leader who would restore order to chaotic Russia and bring it back to its former glory and world regard as a great power. His first year as prime minister ushered in a 10% growth rate for the Russian economy on the heels of the default. His timing was impeccable as his first two presidential terms saw an upswell in the state coffers, which benefited from the huge rise in prices of oil and gas.<sup>8</sup> Putin's reign also saw a reemergence of nationalism amid the nostalgia for the lost great empire that once was.

“Stalin was rehabilitated as the *vozhd* (leader), the genial brain behind the victory in the Great Patriotic War. The archives of the KGB, which had been temporarily opened, were closed again. The great autocratic and imperialist tsars, especially Peter the great, Catherine the Great, Nicholas I, and Alexander III, were rehabilitated and reestablished in their full glory. In September 2000 Tsar Nicholas II was canonized and became an official Orthodox saint. This official revival of old imperial pomp and glory coincided with an increasingly aggressive behavior vis-à-vis the former Soviet Republics.”<sup>9</sup>

With the uptick in nationalism, there was also a resurgence of Russian perception that the fault of all of the turmoil of the post-soviet era was on the West, first by forcing the Soviet Union to fall, and second by profiting from the chaos in Russia that followed.

Once in power, Putin began to consolidate his gains in order to realize the strong state power that he believed it must have. Putin took advantage of the bitter tasting chaos left from Russia's period of liberal democracy to subvert the weakening of central control that had characterized the first decade of democracy. Putin immediately instituted more vertical control of the nation in what turned into a “managed democracy” that would minimize opposition, control mass media, and diminish the power of the judiciary, Duma,

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<sup>8</sup> Van Herpen, Marcel H., *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 53.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

and federal entities.<sup>10</sup> He created “seven new superfederal regions to govern the eighty-nine federal units, whose chiefs would all be appointed by, and beholden to the president.”<sup>11</sup> He privatized many of Russia’s industries to include 90% of the media companies and the oil and gas industry. Under Yeltsin, the leading Russian oil company Gazprom “seemed to be investing in everything apart from its own pipelines and reserves. It was being used like a giant government slush fund and not a natural resource company.”<sup>12</sup> Putin immediately increased control over Gazprom by orchestrating the replacement of its chairman by a man who was once Putin’s former “legal advisor in St. Petersburg, head of his electoral campaign, and... first deputy head of the Presidential Administration,” Dmitriy Medvedev. Medvedev remained chairman until he was elected in 2008 to succeed Putin as Russia’s president.<sup>13</sup> Over the last decade in control, Putin has consolidated the wealth of the nation and control over many of the nation’s key industries and corporations into the hands of a few loyal oligarchs, and consolidated the military and FSB in the hands of trusted loyalists. With these mechanisms in place, Putin is now in firm control of Russia. His objectives are the nation’s objectives, the nation’s strategy is his strategy, and will be for the foreseeable future.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Judah, *Fragile Empire*, 28. Managed Democracy is alleged to be coined by Yeltsin’s Chief of Staff Alexander Voloshin. Meaning a democracy in name with similar institutions of the western inspired liberal democracies, but with much more centralized control and power at the executive. There is a multiple party system but they support the same central leader. The state owns much more of the essential industries in the economy, natural resources, and media control.

<sup>11</sup> Dawisha, Karen, *Putin’s Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 269.

<sup>12</sup> Judah, 42.

<sup>13</sup> Dawisha, 281.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 347-350.

## Putin's International Objectives

In the foreign affairs realm, Putin wants Russia to regain its place as a great power. There remains a suspicion in Russia that the U.S. dominates existing international organizations and that those in turn serve western interests. Because of this, Putin has preferred to build his own international organizations. In 2001, Putin added Uzbekistan to the Shanghai Five, consisting of Russia, China, Kyrgystan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan to form the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO started out as a border settlement charter, but has now expanded into joint military exercises, cooperation on counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics, and as an exchange for cultural cooperation. Pakistan, India, and Iran were later invited for observer status, while the United States has asked to observe, but has been denied.<sup>15</sup> Next, in 2002, Putin revised the 1992 Commonwealth of Independent States' Tashkent Treaty, and created a new organization named the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan were joined by Kyrgystan, Tajikistan, and Armenia as original signatories. Uzbekistan later joined in 2006, but withdrew in 2012. Then, in 2013, both Afghanistan and Serbia were granted observer status. The CSTO was created by Russia as a direct response to the challenge it perceived from the expansion of NATO.<sup>16</sup> Putin has leveraged this organization as a means to block NATO expansion as the members of CSTO are not allowed to join in any other collective security organization. Then, in 2011, Putin announced the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), as a rival to the European Union, with Customs Union partners, Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan as the founding members. However, Putin wrote, that he hoped for the future inclusion of more partners, especially

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<sup>15</sup> Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars*, 69-70.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

those from the former Common wealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>17</sup> This organization again is a direct response to the growing expansion of the European Union into Russia's perceived spheres of influence. Finally, Putin has attempted to play up the BRICS organization (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and as of 2011, South Africa) as another body that he hopes to leverage for international prestige and power. Putin hopes that the BRICS development bank would challenge the western dominated IMF and World Bank.<sup>18</sup> Collectively, Putin's foreign policy strategy is to engage any and every nation possible in any alliance or partnership that could challenge U.S. and European dominated international organizations, while bringing international leadership prestige home to Russia. The hosting of the 2014 Olympic games, 2016 Hockey World Championship, and the 2018 soccer World Cup are all part of re-establishing Russia's great power status.

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<sup>17</sup> Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars*, 75.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 70-72.



## CHAPTER 4: RUSSIAN STRATEGIC APPRAISAL

This paper defines strategy as a framework with which to achieve a nation's desired political ends. It is an application of the means at a nation's disposal. These means are grouped into Instruments of National Power: Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic. The strategic framework also encompasses the ways in which the means are applied to achieve the desired ends. The strategic framework has levels; Grand Strategy, which is associated with the synergy of all instruments of power, and Strategy, which is the framework for each individual instrument. Both Grand Strategy and Strategy rely on national policy to define the desired ends to achieve and provide boundaries for the ways and means. How the ends, ways, and means are applied, focused, and/or constrained are in line with enduring national interests and the nation's strategic culture. National interests and national strategic culture are considered semi-malleable over time, but represent the most enduring qualities, concerns, and objectives of the nation that focus and shape how a nation crafts policy and strategy over time.

In assessing strategy, Harry Yarger asserts that a “strategist(s) must first determine the state's interests and the factors in the environment that potentially affect those interests.”<sup>1</sup> The previous chapters laid out the frameworks of Russia's strategic culture and Putin's rise to power in an effort to illuminate the many factors influencing Russian national interests and national strategy. This chapter will further assess Russian strategy through an exploration of the pertinent areas of the 2009 *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*, the 2014 *Military Doctrine of the Russian*

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<sup>1</sup> Yarger, Harry, “Strategic Appraisal: The Key to Effective Strategy.” *The Army War College Guide to National Security Issues*, Vol I, July (2010): 53-64.

*Federation*, and finally the proposed changes that are described for the *2016 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*.

### Russian National Security Strategy

In May 2009 President Dimitriy Medvedev approved the *National Security Strategy* (NSS) of the Russian Federation until 2020. The document replaced the dated security concept from 2000. The strategy highlighted Russia's perception of the world and its own security situation, and defined Russia's national interests and strategic priorities. Of primary importance is the confirmation that Russia intends to continue to rely on nuclear deterrence and nuclear parity vis-à-vis the United States. The NSS also demonstrates that Russia perceives there is a failure in the current global and regional security architecture which it believes favors U.S. and NATO interests. Additionally, the document strongly voices opposition to further eastward enlargement of NATO or expansion of NATO's military infrastructure into nations on Russia's borders. The NSS also opposes the expanded use of NATO's forces outside of its regional boundaries.<sup>2</sup> At the time, there was a significant and enduring NATO presence in Afghanistan on Russia's exposed southern front. This force relied on a logistics train through and the fostering of relationships with the central Asian states, which Russia perceived as its sphere of influence. When coupled with an erosion of Russian influence over former Soviet spheres in Eastern Europe and the Caucus in favor NATO influence, this new front represented a grave concern to Russia's interests.

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<sup>2</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*. Moscow, May 12, 2009. The International Relations and Security Network, May 12, 2009. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=154915> (accessed September 15, 2015).

While it avoids naming the United States directly, the Russian strategy does say that attempts by leading states to achieve military supremacy is a threat to its national security. Additionally, it specifically calls out unilateral development of a global missile defense system and the militarization of space as perceived threats, as it does for certain policies directed at the counterproliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological threats. This essentially is a reference to the threat it perceives over U.S. willingness to unilaterally violate the sovereignty of nations in pursuit of the counterproliferation of WMD. It also states that Russia is willing to build a strategic partnership with the United States on shared interests, but emphasizes it as an equal partnership. It seeks new agreements with the U.S. in disarmament and arms control, confidence building measures, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, antiterrorist cooperation, and the regulation of regional conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

According to this strategy, the key national interests of the country in both the international and military spheres lie in the protection of Russian sovereignty, its independence, and its territorial integrity. Its military is expected to remain strong enough to prevent military aggression against both Russia and its allies. Additionally, the document establishes a belief in the country's position as a great power and aspires for it to become one of the more influential power centers in a multipolar world. There are also numerous declarations through the document that affirm Russia's commitment to the adherence of international law.<sup>4</sup> Yet, these statements are strictly about international law's protection of a nation's sovereignty and again alludes to Russia's belief that the

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<sup>3</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

U.S. is willing to unilaterally violate national sovereignty, using Afghanistan, Iraq, and many other conflicts as indicators.

The Russian NSS is similar to that of the U.S. in that it ties economic prosperity and independence as a mechanism to achieve the desired level of national security. Russia recognizes its GDP dependency on the export of raw materials and is concerned by its dependency on foreign investments and trade for its economy, especially in agriculture, and on its import dependency on foodstuffs, technology, and medications. A key Russian goal is to become one of the five biggest world economies by 2020. Pragmatically, Russia associates its energy and natural resource exports and reserves as a source of strength and influence on the international stage. The strategy acknowledges that international policy will be focused on access to energy reserves to include the Barents Sea, Arctic, Middle East, Caspian Sea, and Central Asia. As a warning, the NSS states that it cannot exclude the possibility that the competitive struggle for dwindling resources worldwide may be solved with the use of military force.<sup>5</sup> This could be a reference to competing Arctic claims, as well as Russian concerns that nations either covet or will covet its underutilized territory, especially as the world food and water supply reaches critical levels vis-à-vis world population growth.

### Russian Military Doctrine

The 2014 *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation* focuses more narrowly on the military priorities required to ensure its nation's security. This analysis will focus on specific areas and aspects where the Military Doctrine is unique or provides either width or depth to areas covered by the Russian National Security Strategy. In the Doctrine,

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<sup>5</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*.

Russia spells out the specific military threats and the tactics and techniques that it finds the most disturbing. The document also expands on the nations and regions it views as critical to its national interests and specifies the varying degree of engagement the military is to have.<sup>6</sup> An analysis of Russia's military engagements will aide the examination of future sources of friction in a later chapter.

Russia identifies numerous military threats to its national security. The document describes its concern regarding the show of military force or exercises within nations or territories contiguous to Russia or its allies and the mobilization of military command and control elements to control operations under wartime conditions.<sup>7</sup> This is a fairly straight forward concern over the frequency, character, and location of NATO's exercises, rotational deployments, and the accompanying command and control standup that occurs during these events. Russia will place itself on a higher military alert during these occurrences as it believes NATO's increased mobility posture could also indicate a prelude to intervention in Russia or its allies. This is a common theme throughout the document indicating the fears the Russia's leadership has of invasion. It believes the U.S. has historically demonstrated the capability and intent to intervene in a sovereign nation that does not comply with U.S. values or interests. The Russian Military Doctrine voices concerns over actions taken by 'foreign powers' that have exacerbated military and/or political situations and created conditions to justify the use of military force inside of another sovereign nation.<sup>8</sup> This appears contradictory to Russian actions in Ukraine, but

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<sup>6</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*. Moscow, Feb 5, 2010. The International Relations and Security Network, February 5, 2009. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lang=en&id=154906> (accessed, October 20, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the narrative in Russia is that the Kiev uprising was a western influenced and financed coup d'état against the Russian backed regime. They fear the same thing can occur within Russia or its allies.

The Military Doctrine illuminates the inherent fear and suspicion of a nation that is obsessed with its own security, the embodiment of a key element of Russian strategic culture. There is an underlying concern that 'Color Revolutions' or Arab Spring scenarios could play out within Russia. Russia fears the establishment and training of armed force elements inside of Russia or its allies and worries that these entities could try to forcibly change its constitutional system and destabilize the internal political situation. The Doctrine speculates that military power is not necessarily the primary method for achieving these types of aims. Instead, the document voices concern over possible information warfare on the population, especially the youth, for the purpose of undermining the historical, spiritual, and patriotic traditions of the nation.<sup>9</sup> Later, the Military Doctrine expands on those concerns by characterizing modern warfare to include the foreign financing of political and public movements and the wide use of public protest from the population. To ensure internal security against this disruption, the document directs the armed forces to be prepared to execute martial law upon direction of the President.<sup>10</sup>

The Russian Doctrine continues to emphasize political and military cooperation first and foremost with Belarus, and secondly with the Russian recognized 'Republics' of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, it directs military engagement and

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<sup>9</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Abkhazia and South Ossetia are breakaway regions within Georgia that are only recognized as independent republics by UN members: Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and the pacific island of Nauru.

commitments to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and as well as with specific member states of these organizations. The document also alludes to the Russian desire to maintain or reclaim its former Soviet associations with references to being prepared for peacekeeping in, and continuing the development or formation of allied relations with, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The Military doctrine also adds that one of the armed forces' many main missions includes supporting Russian interests in the Arctic.<sup>12</sup>

The Doctrine lays out additional areas of military concern that could be used as areas of mutual interest with the United States. Russia expresses concern about the militarization of space to include conventional direct strike weapons. It sets an objective to conclude an international treaty on the prohibition of various types of weapons in space. Additionally, the document explores the threat and spread of international terrorism, transnational crime, and threats to freedom of navigation by piracy. The document also describes Russia's willingness to militarily support operations sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council or other entities empowered by international law. Finally the document highlights a mission for the armed forces to protect and defend Russian Federation citizens living outside of the Federation against armed attack.<sup>13</sup> This statement on the surface appears no different than the U.S. intent to protect its citizens at home or abroad. However, as subsequent chapters will describe, there are large communities of millions of ethnic Russians living in nations adjacent to Russia. As we

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<sup>12</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

have seen in Estonia, Georgia, and Ukraine, Russia's stated intent could bring about conflict with some of its bordering nations over this issue.

### 2016 Strategy Update

In January 2016, Russia announced an update to their *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020*. Russian Security Council Secretary, Nikolai Patrushev conducted an interview with the Russian newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, where he highlighted the changes for the updated document. Many of these changes reiterate areas previously explored in the 2014 Military Doctrine. This includes an emphasis on the threat that continued NATO expansion poses, the destabilizing effects that would accompany the creation of a global missile defense system, and NATO's perceived global offensive posturing. The Secretary also labels new threats and explains the intent behind some of Russia's more recent international and domestic activities.<sup>14</sup>

First and foremost the Secretary describes changes to Russia's domestic security environment that are very internally focused. The drop in oil prices, coupled with economic sanctions by the west, and exacerbated by the nation's economic dependency on raw material export, is affecting government revenue. He believes Russia has shown resilience throughout the imposed economic sanctions, but says that the new strategy will seek to avoid domestic instability through economic growth and diversification of the economy to include the strengthening of its military industrial complex and advancement in technological fields.<sup>15</sup> There is an underpinning here and in the Military Doctrine of a

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<sup>14</sup> Egorov, Ivan, "Nikolai Patrushev: an updated National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation." *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, December 22, 2015. <http://www.rg.ru/2015/12/22/patrushev-site.html> English translation: [http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=0ce\\_1451939610](http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=0ce_1451939610) (accessed January 8, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Russian perception that the economic sanctions are being used as a means to topple their government and allow western influences to take control. To prevent this and address other weakness, the strategy has internal focal areas that are meant to be bulwarks against outside influence and intervention, to include an emphasis on traditional spiritual and moral Russian values. With economic sanctions in effect, the strategy places a value on the spiritual over the material, family, service to motherland, and historical unity of the country's people. Many of these themes are areas where Russian leadership perceives western culture and values are capable of corrupting the populace.<sup>16</sup>

The Secretary also references the interventions in the Middle East and North Africa as resulting in the strengthening of international terrorist organizations. This has produced long-term instability in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria that need solutions. The new strategy emphasizes the importance of partnerships with the United States and Europe on the basis of common interests, including economic ones, but again insists on equal partnerships.<sup>17</sup> Russia believes that it is not only a world power, but a world leader.<sup>18</sup> However, Russia realizes that overt confrontation with the US. will harm both its national security and internal stability. The Secretary acknowledges that Russia needs to avoid restarting an arms race. This assertion is indicative of both Russia's inability to sustain such a pursuit and its reliance on nuclear parity to achieve the desired balance of power.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Dubovikova, Maria, "Is Russia a world power or a world leader?" *Al Arabiya News*, January 6, 2016. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/world/2016/01/06/Is-Russia-a-world-power-or-a-world-leader-.html> (accessed January 8, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Egorov, *Nikolai Patrushev*.

<sup>18</sup> Dubovikova, *Is Russia a world power or a world leader?*

<sup>19</sup> Egorov, *Nikolai Patrushev*.

## Strategic Assessment

Russia values Westphalian sovereignty and the protections afforded to its security by international law and the United Nations charter.<sup>20</sup> It believes the U.S. is willing to threaten Russian sovereignty and perceives that the law of force has replaced international law. It bases this assertion on their view that the U.S. and its allies have violated national sovereignty on numerous occasions and for various reasons from Grenada, Panama, and Serbia, to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and most recently in Libya and Syria. In each of these cases the U.S. invoked different sources of legitimization from international law to intervene; whether it was the UN's Responsibility to Protect in Serbia or the protection of U.S. citizens in Panama and Grenada. Russia's perspective is that when they invoked similar reasons for Russia's interventions that they met unreasonable unnecessary resistance from the U.S. and west. This perceived double standard further stimulates Russia's view that many of these international institutions have simply become tools to serve western interests.<sup>21</sup>

Russia views great power status as being derived from territory first and foremost. This is logical as Russia is the largest country in the world by landmass. It approaches the world with a thousand year history as not only a European, but also Asian power, with a bit of a chip on its shoulder. The chip originates from being a marginalized nation whose populace and major cities are on the periphery of Europe while the vast majority of

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<sup>20</sup> Krasner, Stephen D., "Sharing Sovereignty: New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States." *International Security* Vol 29, No 2 (Fall 2004), 87. The fundamental rule of Westphalian sovereignty is to refrain from intervening in the internal affairs of other states and that each state has the right to determine its own domestic authority structures. The principle of non-intervention is traditionally associated with the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, a treaty between the Prussian states, though Krasner advocates this wasn't explicitly articulated until a century later by a Swiss Jurist publication in 1758.

<sup>21</sup> Raina, Himanil, "Legal Questions of Russia's Intervention in Ukraine" *International Policy Digest*. April 21, 2014. <http://intpolicydigest.org/2014/04/21/legal-questions-russia-s-intervention-ukraine/> (accessed Mar 12, 2016).

territory is in Asia. There is a widely held belief that throughout history Russia has never been quite accepted as a European nation or treated on equal terms with other European nations. Part of this is related to its fairly unique Christian Orthodoxy and emphasis on its distinctive Pan-Slav identity. Additionally, Russia has maintained its autocratic, centralized, and vertically controlled ruling structure long after the rest of Europe developed into more democratic systems.<sup>22</sup>

Russia sees a threat to its future prosperity and thus its ability to remain a great power, from its projected population decline and its inability to effectively exploit its own territory and resources. Additionally, Russia faces challenges from its over-dependence on energy exports and from the negative effects that rampant corruption has had on economic growth and state revenues. The Russian government has been unable or unwilling to reform the country's energy-dependent economy, even though the current low prices of oil and gas now limit the nations abilities to further modernize its military.<sup>23</sup>

As the Soviet Union, Russia experienced the power and respect from Europe and the world that they always thought they deserved, and they want to reclaim that standing. For Russia and Putin, the 1990's attempt at western liberal democracy is seen as a failure and there is no going back. During this period, Russians believe that they were embarrassed and exploited from within and by the west.<sup>24</sup> Now, Russia wants to be at the forefront of a new global economic system, while it continues to leverage its place in existing international organizations that follow internationally agreed laws (the UN Security Council). Putin requires that Russia gains equality with the world's principal

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<sup>22</sup> Van Herpen, Marcel H., *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 33-39.

<sup>23</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*.

<sup>24</sup> Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars*, 52-55.

power centers of China, the EU, and the US, and demands its place among the leaders of a global, multipolar world.

Russia also seeks to expand the reach of their new international organizations that claim to focus on mutual national interests shared with potential partners, but at their heart, the organizations target the inclusion of nations or regions where Russia wants to gain or maintain its influence. These international organizations also court nations, regions, or affiliations that have been or that they perceive to have been marginalized or excluded by the western dominated organizations. An example of this included the invitation to Greece to take a loan from the BRICS development bank as an alternative to the EU loan with its imposed austerity measures during the Greece bailout woes of mid 2015.<sup>25</sup> Russia has also invited Serbia and Afghanistan to observe the CSTO and asked Pakistan and India to observe a SCO exercise. Russia has long maintained and now is further developing a stronger relationship with Iran, a state long grouped into the U.S 'axis of evil.'

In the second presidential term of Vladimir Putin, Russia abandoned its path towards integration with greater Europe and the west and instead began to pursue goals that would put it at odds with the rest of Europe. Putin laid out objectives for Russia to maintain its preeminence over former Soviet states and retain influence over the states on its borders as buffers to its perceived threats. By August, 2008, Medvedev introduced his five principles of foreign policy which "included the right for the Kremlin to protect Russians...wherever they are."<sup>26</sup> This principle has given them the excuse on numerous

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<sup>25</sup> Kennedy, Simon, "BRICS bank invite to Greece has Jim O'Neill Thinking it's a Joke." *Bloomberg Business*, May 14, 2015. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-05-14/brics-bank-invite-to-greece-has-jim-o-neill-thinking-it-s-a-joke> (accessed January 4, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars*, 4.

occasions to intervene on behalf of Russian nationals. Many of Russia's external actions have also been attempts at consolidating power and promoting internal security.

Interventions in the Ukraine and Syria promote a rally around the flag effect that reduces criticism of government policies during wartime and increases popular backing for the leadership. This level of support and acceptance of the repression of freedoms is unsustainable unless concrete economic improvements for its citizens are forthcoming and there is a guarantee of security for the populace. This drives the regime's perception of its vulnerability and fear of foreign influence over its internal political affairs, foreign cultural and informational influence on the populace (especially the youth), and its overdependence on raw materials and on western economic models and trade to sustain its economic growth.<sup>27</sup>

### Strategy Case Study

A study of Russian strategy through a review of its strategic documents serves as a foundation for further analysis of its recent foreign policy actions. This section leverages Graham Allison's three conceptual frameworks for analyzing foreign policy, as a way to validate the "why" behind Russia's actions. Allison's three models look at international decision making through different perspectives. Model I is that of a singular rational actor, in this case Putin. Model II, views actions through the lens of critical organizations of the state and how their standard operating procedures affect decisions, and Model III focuses on how these actions affect or are affected by internal government politics. Though each of these models by themselves cannot answer 'the why,' collectively they can provide a framework of explanations through different lenses that

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<sup>27</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*.

ultimately will be closer to the truth. Through this comparison the analysis will reveal if any hidden agendas exist or if Russia is simply pursuing its strategy as defined in its strategic documents. This section will examine Russia's recent actions in Syria, and how these align with the interests of Putin as the leader of Russia, the interests of key governmental organizations, and with internal Russian politics.<sup>28</sup>

The previous chapter on the rise of Putin clearly demonstrates that he is firmly in charge of steering his nation's foreign policy. Russian strategic documents clearly describe the importance and value of preserving old allies and fostering new allies. Russian strategy also describes Russia's concern with the preservation of a nation's sovereignty and the negative influence that regime changes have had on the stability of nations to include Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and on the growth of international terrorism.<sup>29</sup>

The toppling of Gadhafi and subsequent mutilation of his body following the uprising in Libya deeply affected Putin's psyche.<sup>30</sup> Putin could not allow his Ukrainian ally and its former leader, Viktor Yanukovich, to be taken by that nation's coup d'état, and he could not allow Russia's long term ally, Assad, to be taken either. Thus the supply of weapons and eventual insertion of Russian forces into Syria served to prop up and protect a failing ally in an important region of the globe where Russia has few allies.<sup>31</sup> Putin is willing to expend the time and resources on this endeavor because it also serves multiple facets of Russia's national interests. The physical protection of an ally serves as

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<sup>28</sup> Allison, Graham, and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (Second Edition)* (New York: Longman, 1999), 274-276.

<sup>29</sup> Egorov, Nikolai Patrushev

<sup>30</sup> Shuster, Simon, "Top Russian Diplomat Explains Reasons for Syrian Arms Sales." *Time*, May 17, 2013. <http://world.time.com/2013/05/17/top-russian-diplomat-explains-logic-behind-syrian-arms-sales/> (accessed September 15, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

an assurance to members of their other Russian alliances, like the CSTO, and to any future allies, that Russia will honor collective security agreements.

Russia's involvement in Syria also reflects its national interests in the global environment at large. Putin's strategic documents declare his intent to be a leader in global affairs. Russia's commitment in Syria guarantees it an important voice with regards to an area and issue of global concern. Russia's involvement also serves as a venue to highlight their resolute support of national sovereignty and assertion that meddling in another nation's affairs breeds nothing but instability. This force insertion also serves to secure their key military installation at Tartus, the only Russian naval base on the Mediterranean coast. Finally, Russia shares the global concern over the spread of Islamic extremist terrorism. Russia felt threatened by the unconstrained operation within Syria and rise to power of many of its old Chechen War adversaries. It does not wish to see them return, nor does it want extremism to take hold in other, predominately Muslim, areas of both Russia and its neighbors.

The timing of Russian involvement reflects a perceived opening to achieve many of these goals. The continued failure of U.S. policy and its actions to support moderate rebels in the Syrian conflict and to act decisively against ISIS created the opportunity for Russia to enter the region. Additionally, European and world opinion may have swung more in favor of achieving a guarantee of stability and the removal of ISIS, and therefore may be less concerned now over the removal of Assad's regime and creation of a democracy. The decision to insert Russian forces at this time, as world opinion changes, could help stabilize a regime friendly to Russia, create prestige for Russia and Putin alike, and preserve Russian access to the Mediterranean port. Additionally, assisting Assad has

created new opportunities for Russia to advance its relationship with Iran, Shi'ite Iraq, and the Shi'ite community at large, all entities that have strained relations with the U.S.<sup>32</sup>

Allison's second model views an action through the lens of the critical organizations of that state and the way that their standard operating procedures affect decision making.<sup>33</sup> When it comes to the Middle East and Syria in general, there are a number of Russian national interests in play as they relate to some key government entities in Russia. The military and the oil oligarchy are two of these very important organizations which have a vested interest in Russia's involvement in Syria. The military is a fraction of the size that it once was at the height of the Soviet Union, but still owns some of the world's most advanced military hardware, to include nuclear weapons. In the 2014 Military Doctrine it was charged with advancing Russia's national security strategy, maintaining world-wide access commensurate with a great power, and to defend its allies. The seizure and subsequent annexation of the Crimean peninsula, which includes Sevastopol, the primary warm water port of the Russian fleet, furthers the notion that the Russian military values the access to the Mediterranean Sea that both Sevastopol and the port of Tartus provide. Additionally, overtures in the past with Cyprus for port access, reinforces this view that Russia sees warm water port access to and through the Mediterranean as essential to achieving its national security strategy.<sup>34</sup> At present, the Russian military has also leveraged this presence in Syria to establish an air base in Latakia, their first in the region.

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<sup>32</sup> Khan, Imran, "Iraq, Russia, Iran and Syria coordinate against ISIL." *Al Jazeera*, September 27, 2015. <http://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/iraq-russia-iran-and-syria-coordinate-against-isil/ar-AAeQ9pK>(accessed January 4, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Allison, Graham, and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*

<sup>34</sup> BBC, "Cyprus denies 'Russia deal on military bases'" *BBC.com*, February 9, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31293330> (accessed Jan 4, 2016).



To achieve all of the goals set for it by the nation strategy, the Russian military needs a secure budget, and Russian military budgets are highly dependent upon state oil revenue. Oil and gas accounts are the largest single source that the Russian state relies on for up to 50% of its revenue.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, many of the Russian elite and state power brokers have wealth tied to the state oil companies. At present, oil is at a decade low and revenues are much more constrained than in the past. Russian access or influence in the Middle East oil rich region, to include greater relations with Iran, may advance the oil oligarchs' bottom line directly or indirectly. If Russia is able to bolster its presence in the region, Russian companies may gain greater access to develop and exploit regional oil. Additionally, if Russia is successful in aiding the EU to achieve its two primary objectives, stopping ISIS and stopping the refugee flow, Russia may be able to leverage an easing of the economic sanctions against it. Finally, at the core, instability in and around the Middle East has more often than not, translated into increases in oil prices. With Russia's economic growth and dependence on oil and gas revenue, higher prices in oil translates into greater Russian wealth and power, no matter the cause.

The final look at Russia's intervention in Syria is through the lens of internal politics. As this thesis has described, Putin's control over Russia is tenuous. This was on full display in 2012, when protests broke out over his return to the presidency.<sup>36</sup> Since then, the Ukraine conflict created a rally around the flag effect promoting nationalist fervor. The fervor was harnessed internally in two ways; (first) "to divert the attention of the people from the real problems in the country and to knit them together behind the

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<sup>35</sup> Dawisha, Karen, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 332.

<sup>36</sup> Herszenhorn, David M., and Ellen Barry, "Large Anti-Putin Protests Signals Growing Resolve." *The New York Times*, June 12, 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/13/world/europe/anti-putin-demonstrators-gather-in-moscow.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/13/world/europe/anti-putin-demonstrators-gather-in-moscow.html?_r=1) (accessed December 15, 2015).

regime and (second) to repress democracy and/or stifle demands for democracy.”<sup>37</sup> The results boosted Putin’s approval ratings above 80%.<sup>38</sup> However, the Ukraine conflict eventually bogged down into a stalemate and the economy was under siege from western sanctions. Putin needed a new and possibly more successful campaign in Syria to revive popular support, secure his power, and suppress opposition.

A look at Russian intervention in Syria from the three vantage points illuminates Russian strategy and national interests in application. The intervention appears entirely consistent with the Russian National Security Strategy and its associated international objectives. A comparable look at Russia’s actions in the Ukraine or Georgia would most likely yield similar results. Though Russia many have additional clandestine agendas at work that are not apparent in their strategic documents, their current actions in Syria are also consistent with Russia’s strategic culture and enduring national interests. The next chapter will look to build on this knowledge base in order to discuss areas where Russia’s strategic culture, enduring national interests, and security documents point to likely friction areas with the U.S. and its allies in the future.

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<sup>37</sup> Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars*, 54.

<sup>38</sup> Birnbaum, Michael, “Putin’s approval ratings hit 89 percent, the highest they have ever been” *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2015.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/06/24/putins-approval-ratings-hit-89-percent-the-highest-theyve-ever-been/> (accessed September 15, 2015).

## CHAPTER 5: FUTURE FRICTION AREAS

Russia's prevailing world-view regarding power is one that sees a U.S. dominated unipolar world as unacceptable. It also realizes that a return to the balanced bipolar world of the Cold War is unachievable. Thus, Russia is determined that the world should be multipolar, and that it will be one of the great power centers. This overarching worldview informs Russia's actions on the world stage. Likewise, Russia maintains a heightened perception of insecurity. NATO's expansion has only served to further amplify those concerns. Finally, Russia may be at the precipice of a shift in its strategic approach that in the past has often relied on its military as its primary means to achieve its goals. In an analysis of their strategic documents there are indications that Russia realizes that economic power may actually be the best means to achieve its security.<sup>1</sup> If this was the case, this shift would represent a potential opportunity for re-engagement.

### Internal Unrest

As described in the analysis of Russian strategic culture, the Russian people are traditionally more tolerant of authoritarian regimes, but only to a certain limit. This limit is predicated on the nation providing the people with the level of security they require, the feeling of prestige they want for their state, and the level of prosperity that was promised. When these needs are not met, the people's sacrifice of freedoms becomes less tolerable. Riddled throughout the strategic documents are indications that Putin's regime fears internal unrest and is especially paranoid that the west will finance or flame this unrest. The national and military strategies point to methods the regime will employ to

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<sup>1</sup> Eitelhuber, Norbert, "The Russian Bear: Russian Strategic Culture and What it Implies for the West." *The Quarterly Journal* Winter (2009).

maintain internal security. Since Russia values sovereignty over all else, any criticism or perceived meddling of a foreign government or entity in the Russian government's internal affairs will become an immediate source of friction.

### Ethnic Russian Populations

President Medvedev's five principles and the subsequent publication of the 2014 Military Doctrine describe the right of Russia to intervene militarily under the pretext of the protection of Russians. Russian actions in Estonia in 2007, Georgia in 2008, and the Crimea and Donbass in 2014, have established this proclaimed right as a credible threat to future stability. The nations bordering with Russia that have the most ethnic Russian populations are Ukraine with the largest population, Kazakhstan with the second largest, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Interestingly, over 3.1 million Ethnic Russians live in the United States, making it the third largest Russian diaspora. Russians make up roughly 25% of Estonian and 27% of Latvian populations.<sup>2</sup> The greatest concentrations of Ethnic Russians are in the Crimea and the Donbass region, followed by the eastern sliver of Estonia along the Russian border. There are also large concentrations of passport holding Russians both in the Transnistria and southern Moldova.<sup>3</sup> In the geo-strategic environment, large populations in Kazakhstan are relatively secure since that nation is fully wedded to Russian sponsored organizations. Nations of future concern include Uzbekistan, which has inched further away from the

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<sup>2</sup> Stratfor, "Baltic States Concerned about Large Russian Minorities." *Stratfor.com*, October 16, 2014. [https://www.stratfor.com/image/baltic-states-concerned-about-large-russian-minority?0=ip\\_login\\_no\\_cache%3D0e1477a2a4a75d48c69f7aa0b730dce9](https://www.stratfor.com/image/baltic-states-concerned-about-large-russian-minority?0=ip_login_no_cache%3D0e1477a2a4a75d48c69f7aa0b730dce9) (accessed January 4, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Bender, Jeremy, "These Countries with Large Russian Populations should fear what Putin might do next." *Business Insider*, March 21, 2014. <http://www.businessinsider.com/countries-with-large-russian-populations-2014-3> (accessed December 15, 2015).

Russian sphere, Estonia, where there is a 73% concentration of ethnic Russian along the border, and Moldova. Unrest or perceived threats to any of these diaspora communities, especially in the three nations specified would represent the most likely risk of future conflict with Russia.

### Former Soviet Spheres of Influence

The Russian National Security Strategy until 2020 and the 2014 Military Doctrine describe the importance of the former Soviet states and buffer nations along Russia's border. Putin has attempted to invite many of these same nations into the various international organizations and collective security treaties Russia has created. Nations within this sphere and belonging to these organizations are critical allies for Russia and any change to that status would be cause for Russian concern. Of these, based on international associations, Belarus is the now the number one priority ally for Russia, with Kazakhstan close behind. Any attempts by European nations to court Belarus into any association, agreement, or into the European Union would provoke a stark reaction from Russia. Any outreach to Kazakhstan would be met with a similar reaction by Russia.

The frozen conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are also non-negotiable for Russia. Russia has demonstrated a willingness to undertake militarily hostilities in Georgia even though that nation had fostered U.S. relations. Russia has included these 'republics' in its strategic plans, defense commitments, and has invited them into its international organizations. Through these actions they have effectively blocked Georgia's ability to join NATO or the EU, since these unresolved conflicts prevent membership acceptance.

Of future concern is the level of association described by the Military and National Security documents regarding the Commonwealth of Independent States. A number of these states do not belong to the CSTO or EEU, but the Russian NSS has openly described their desired inclusion. Moldova is the most concerning of the CIS nations for the NATO alliance. As a member of the CIS, the EEU extended an invitation to Moldova, which has chosen instead to pursue an association with the European Union. There have also been calls for the frozen zone of Transnistria, the eastern border territory of Moldova, to join the EEU.<sup>4</sup> This situation is compounded by the concentrations of ethnic Russians in Transnistria and southern Moldova, and by the presence of Russian peacekeepers in Transnistria.<sup>5</sup>

### Competing International Blocs

Russia has indicated its desire to challenge western dominated institutions. As described in both national security strategies, Russia perceives that the U.S. and Europe dominate most of the international organization power centers in the globe. It lists the U.S. and E.U. as economic rivals, NATO as a military rival, and the UN agencies of the World Bank, IMF, and dollar based world economic system as barriers.<sup>6</sup> As the Russian NSS demonstrates, Russia is pursuing the creation of organizations and alliances where any commonality can be found, a good example of which is highlighted in the BRICS

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<sup>4</sup> Romanian News Agency, "Russian Deputy Foreign Minister pleas for Transnistria's integration in Customs Union." *ActMedia*, June 11, 2014. <http://actmedia.eu/daily/russian-deputy-foreign-minister-pleas-for-transnistria-s-integration-in-customs-union/52593> (accessed October 20, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Croft, Adrian, "NATO Commander warns of Russian Threat to separatist Moldova region". *Reuters*, March 24, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-idUSBREA2M09920140324> (accessed September 15, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*. Moscow, May 12, 2009. The International Relations and Security Network, May 12, 2009. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=154915> (accessed September 15, 2015)..

(Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and BRICS bank. These organizations play a dual role of both providing international prestige and power to Russia, as well as challenging western based organizations for power. Additionally, Russia will continue to try to expand the EEU as a counterbalance to EU expansion. The pull between these two organizations and the ultimate choice by the former Ukraine president Yanukovych to stop EU membership is one of the root causes behind the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and the greater Ukraine crisis. How nations align with these two economic unions may be a source of friction in the future. The US and NATO should have similar concerns about Russia's creation of the CSTO as a Warsaw Pact revival. This organization is a reaction to Russia's perceived threat from further NATO expansion and is attempting to court non-aligned nations. Afghanistan and Serbia have been invited as observers, and indications are that Iran may follow. However, this organization could also serve as a bulwark against the rise China and its influence in central Asia.

### Arctic Claims

In its 2002 Arctic claim submission to the UN, Russia moved one step closer to consolidating its hold over one of the last vestiges of unclaimed territory left in the world. This area is of utmost importance to Russia's sense of great power status, which is derived from its territory and its vast, yet unclaimed natural resources. The U.S. currently estimates that the Arctic could contain 15% of the earth's oil, 30% of the natural gas, and 20% of its liquefied natural gas. Additionally, Russia intends to open 16 ports along Arctic coastline, as well as 13 airfields and 10 air defense radar stations in the region.<sup>7</sup> In

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<sup>7</sup> Bender, Jeremy, "Denmark Just Claimed the North Pole." *Business Insider*, December 15, 2014. <http://www.businessinsider.com/denmark-just-claimed-the-north-pole-2014-12> (accessed December 15, 2015).

sum, Russia believes it has a valid claim to a majority of the Arctic resources and the entire northern shipping route. With five nations, including the United States laying claim to this region, how this competition plays out could lead to a future conflict between the United States and Russia.



## CHAPTER 6: DETERRENCE

In Thucydides book 4, *Peace in Sicily*, he quotes a Sicilian orator who states that wars occur because, “one side thinks that the profits to be won outweigh the risks to be incurred.”<sup>1</sup> Russia acts aggressively because it believes that the potential gains outweigh the risks and the cost involved; essentially, that they can get away with it. Changing this thinking will require a strong response from the U.S. to deter Russia’s pursuit of its interests that are counter to the United States interests, and to shape Russian efforts to instead focus their energy on interests that also benefit the United States.

### Deterrence Theory

Thomas Christensen in *The Contemporary Security Dilemma*, asserts that assurance must accompany deterrence. “Successful deterrence requires both threats and assurances about the conditionality of those threats. Otherwise, the target has no reason to comply with deterrence demands.”<sup>2</sup> Christensen advocates that the real security dilemma is how to show strength without being overly provocative, stating “that the target of a deterrent threat must believe its core interests will be spared if it does not commit an act of aggression.”<sup>3</sup> This theory postulates that the Soviet Union’s aggression has been deterred in the past by the U.S. holding at risk core national interests that the Soviets valued more deeply than the object of their aggression. The nuance of this point is that the U.S. threat to these core interests were credible and that the Soviet Union was

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<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Trans. Rex Warner. (London: Penquin Books, 1972), 298.

<sup>2</sup> Christensen, Thomas J., “The Contemporary Security Dilemma: Deterring a Taiwan Conflict” *The Washington Quarterly* 25:4 (Autumn 2002), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

provided a believable reassurance that it would not be deprived of these core national interests if it complied with the deterring states demands.

An example of the failure of deterrence and reassurance can be found in the Korean War. The U.S. forces in the area and South Korean forces on the peninsula did not represent a credible enough military threat to deter North Korea and its Russian and Chinese sponsors from invading the south. Likewise, later in the war, following the Inchon landing and the U.S. move north across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel towards China, the U.S. was “insufficiently reassuring” to China that it would stop at the Yalu and not attack it. This lack of assurance led to China’s perception that attack into China was inevitable, and led to the ensuing escalation of the Korean War and Chinese invasion.<sup>4</sup> As the U.S. looks to deter modern Russia from further aggression, it must be careful to also reassure Russia that its core interests will be protected.

#### Historical Deterrence

Graham Allison’s *The Cuban Missile Crisis* provides an in depth exploration of how the Soviet Union, i.e. Russia, has been successfully deterred and assured in the past. In October of 1962 the Soviet Union and the United States came close to nuclear war over the Soviet insertion of nuclear missiles into Cuba. The United States responded with a naval blockade, the visible threat of 200,000 invasion troops in Florida, and a verbal threat of air strikes or invasion. By the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, Krushchev announced the withdrawal to the communist Presidium. There is much speculation and analysis over the decisions that were made and why they were made. Some of this has speculation has been aided by the release of records in the U.S. and Russia, though the Russian records were

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<sup>4</sup> Christensen, “The Contemporary Security Dilemma,” 8.

later closed. There are important takeaways from this incident that still apply today. First, it is widely believed that Khrushchev thought he could get away with placing missiles in Cuba and that Kennedy would not stand up to him. Secondly, that a strong military response and the threat of an invasion changed the Russian leader's calculus. Finally, the Kennedy and Krushchev letters confirm that the missiles were removed because a compromise had been struck that reassured both nations' core national interests. Krushchev promised to remove the missiles, if his more important national interest, the sovereignty of Cuba, was guaranteed by a U.S. pledge of non-invasion. There is also an indication that the U.S. agreed to the eventual removal of nuclear missiles in Turkey that similarly threatened Russia's security. In this example, the U.S. effectively applied a strong military deterrent to roll back Russian aggression, while assuring Russian core interests of sovereignty and security. Most importantly, to reach an understanding, the two leaders had to actively engage in a dialog to resolve this crisis and agree that mutually assured nuclear destruction was not in either nations' interests.<sup>5</sup> Engagement and the flexing of a deterrent strength while properly reassuring an adversary's core national interests are themes that will reemerge in a modern U.S. strategic approach to Russia.

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<sup>5</sup> Allison, Graham, and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (Second Edition)* (New York: Longman, 1999), 267-272.

## CHAPTER 7: U.S. STRATEGIC APPROACH

There are two competing international relations worldviews that dominate much of the discussion over the modern U.S. strategic approach to Russia. These different ways of looking at the international environment are at the heart of many of the misunderstandings between the two nations. The first worldview is Realism, which in short believes that states will first and foremost act in their own national interests. In doing so they will act predictably in the international environment as they engage in actions that increase their power. Realism traces its source back to Hobbes, whose well known quote was that man's natural state was anarchy, that 'life was nasty, brutish, and short,' and for this reason, a strong government is necessary.<sup>1</sup> A well-known theory of Realism is the balance of power, which states that as one nation rises in power, other nations of lesser strength will band together to balance against them. This theory also prescribes that power itself is relative, in that as one nation gains power it is at the expense of another.<sup>2</sup>

The second worldview prevalent in international relations is Liberalism, which is not to be mistaken with liberal politics. Liberalism is founded in the conviction that international institutions foster a greater interdependence between nations and can thus lessen the likelihood of war. More importantly, the belief is that power is absolute, so that as one nation gains power it does not have to be at the expense of another.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the think tanks and policy centers subscribe to one view or the other in their approaches to solving current international relation problems between Russia and

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Gregory Miller, lecture Introduction to International Relations Theory, 25 Aug 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

the U.S. The suggestions from those in the Realist worldview is that the U.S. must isolate Russia and strengthen its military deterrent.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, the recommendations from the Liberalist worldview is that the U.S. should engage diplomatically with Russia, increase Russia's involvement in international organizations with the U.S., and reduce the U.S. military strength that is perceived as threatening to Russia. The problem is that these opposing solutions do not account for the distinctive ways that Russia, the U.S., and its European allies, all see themselves and approach international relations. These three stakeholders have unique strategic cultures and different worldviews that requires a blended solution to ensure stability for the region.<sup>5</sup>

Historically, the U.S projects a Liberalist worldview throughout its founding documents and National Security Strategy. In these documents the U.S. champions democracy for all, the universal nature of American values, and economic freedom, and then espouses the benefits of international cooperation through organizations and treaties. However, in practice, much of the world sees the U.S. acting just as often in its own national interests, displaying a more Realist worldview. This perspective holds that the U.S. is interested in maintaining its primacy and power in the world of diplomacy and economics, and only joins in treaties or organizations that are in its national interests. An example of this dichotomy would be the U.S. refusal to submit its citizens to the

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<sup>4</sup> Carafano and others, "U.S. Comprehensive Strategy Toward Russia." *Heritage Foundation*, December 9, 2015. <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/12/us-comprehensive-strategy-toward-russia> (accessed January 25, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Igumnova, Lyudmila, "Russia's Strategic Culture Between American and European Worldviews." *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Vol 24, Issue 2 (2011): 254-273. <https://nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=60849619&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (accessed December 20, 2015).

international criminal courts, while still espousing the universal values of human rights and justice that the court is supposed to protect.<sup>6</sup>

Russia is different; it projects itself internationally and acts with a Realist worldview. It perceives power as relative and believes that as the U.S., EU, and NATO have increased their power, it has come at the expense of Russian power. Likewise, if Russia is to regain power, it would be at the expense of these same entities. Russia also feels that its security is threatened by these specific entities, which is why it identifies the U.S., EU, and NATO as the targets for any rebalancing of power.

Fueling Russia's insecurity is its perception that the U.S. says one thing, but does another. Therefore, it does not trust the U.S. and does not believe the U.S. will respect its national sovereignty. Additionally, the Russian's believe they have tried the "western way" of liberal democracy, but were not fully supported or accepted by the west, and thus they fell into the chaos and decay that accompanied a rise in crime across the nation and take over by the oligarchy. It is this perceived betrayal and lack of trust that underpins Russia/U.S. and Russia/western European relationships. Additionally, because of this negative experience, the U.S. and Europe must now accept that Russia is not going to become a liberal democracy anytime soon. They are also not going to join the European Union and help create a post-modern era for that region. Russia has historically approached the international environment with a Realist worldview, and that will not change.

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<sup>6</sup> Evans-Pritchard, Blake and Simon Jennings, "US Takes Cautious Approach to ICC." *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, May 6 2010. <https://www.globalpolicy.org/us-un-and-international-law-8-24/us-opposition-to-the-icc-8-29/49067.html> (accessed October 20, 2015).

This idealization of a post modern European era is precisely what defines the European Union's Liberalist worldview as it approaches Russia and the region.<sup>7</sup> Centuries of conflict among European nations appears to have been quelled by European unification and integration. Traditional Westphalian "sovereign rights [of states, has been] gradually transferred to supranational institutions."<sup>8</sup> The result is that the EU perceives it has achieved greater collective security through increased economic interconnectedness and the sharing of power through military and diplomatic international organizations. The EU's shared beliefs of multilateralism, non-military solutions to conflict, and democratic and humanitarian values, all define their Liberalist worldview. As the U.S. refines its strategic approach to the region, it will need to find a way to blend its own competing worldview with that of Russia and the EU to create a balanced solution for regional stability.

The U.S. must understand that there are three paths that can be taken. The Liberalist path the U.S. has been on is one that has allowed Russian aggression and expansionism to go unchecked. The opposite Realist path will most likely lead to a new cold war and all that such a war would bring with it; regional tensions, conflict over the arctic, conventional military build-up, increased espionage and cyber conflict, and even proxy wars. An increase in tension could then lead to a renewed nuclear arms race, especially since Russia does not have the resources to create the kind of conventional capability that it would need to credibly confront the United States the way the Soviet Union once did. In fact, all indications are that a conventional build up from the West would further push Russia into behaving much like the West did to counter the build up

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<sup>7</sup> Igumnova, "Russia's Starategic Culture Between American and European Worldviews."

<sup>8</sup> Igumnova, "Russia's Starategic Culture Between American and European Worldviews." 255.

of the Soviet Union; it would rely on and strengthen its nuclear arsenal to counter the conventional inequity.<sup>9</sup> The fact is, that over the last decade, many of the U.S. and European approaches to Russia have served only to push Russia towards seeking a stronger relationship with countries in the East.<sup>10</sup> If the U.S. is truly worried about a rising China that is both ideologically and culturally different in its views on universal human rights and values, then why push Russia into seeking China as a partner?<sup>11</sup> Instead, by pursuing a third path, that blends the deterrent strength respected by a Realist nation, with diplomatic engagement and the fostering of greater economic and diplomatic interconnectedness associated with European Liberalism, would serve to make Russia, the U.S., and the EU more secure, while furthering U.S. national interests.

This blended approach is not unique. For the U.S., power has long come from its hard sources; a strong military and economic engine. However, the U.S.'s hidden source of power and influence in the world has been its international appeal and universal support of prosperity and freedom for all; i.e. its soft power. Teddy Roosevelt's corollary "speak softly, but carry a big stick" was about the nation peacefully engaging and negotiating with adversaries, while keeping the stick in hand as a credible threat, though not holding it over their heads. Recent worldwide discussion about the decline of the U.S. economic and military power has given off the perception that a vacuum of power is

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<sup>9</sup> Adamsky, Dmitry, "If War Comes Tomorrow: Russian Thinking About Regional Nuclear Deterrence." *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Vol 27, Issue 1 (2014): 164-188. <https://nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=94856644&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (accessed Sep 10, 2015), 166-167.

<sup>10</sup> Wang, Wan, "Impact of Western Sanctions on Russia in the Ukraine Crisis." *Journal of Politics and Law* Vol 8, No 2 (2015). <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/jpl/article/view/45567/25287> (accessed December 15, 2015)

<sup>11</sup> Gay, John Allen, "Russia's Ukraine Invasion: an opportunity for America?" *The Diplomat*, April 16, 2014. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/russias-ukraine-invasion-an-opportunity-for-america/> (accessed October 20, 2015).



beginning to develop. The reality is that the U.S. is not going anywhere and continues to grow more powerful. However, the real message that the United States should emphasize is its belief that this growth does not come at the expense of others, i.e. that power is absolute and not relative. Other nations can grow stronger without affecting U.S.'s perception of its own strength and power. The U.S. should revive Teddy Roosevelt's corollary, and "speak softly, but carry a big stick."

### Instruments of Power

The U.S. strategic approach to Russian revanchism should include demonstrating a credible deterrent strength, but with an assurance of sovereignty and security for all of the region, to include Russia. The contemporary approach of U.S. deterrence seeks only to provide assurances of security to its allies and by doing so it neglects the nuance of Christensen's theory of deterrence, as described in the previous chapter. Reassurances, to Russia, must be built into deterrent threats, so that Russia will not fear being deprived of its core national interests if it complies with the U.S. and NATO's demands.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. can deter future Russian aggression first and foremost by recognizing Russia's core national interests, providing a credible assurance of their protection, while also possessing a credible threat to these interests to ensure compliance. The U.S. can respect Russian sovereignty and assure Russian security by continuing the defensive posture of NATO as a guarantee for European peace. U.S. DIME efforts should focus on reassuring Russia about these core interests, while showing the capability to hold these interests at risk if required in order to deter Russia from its more aggressive and destabilizing pursuits.

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<sup>12</sup> Christensen, Thomas J., "The Contemporary Security Dilemma: Deterring a Taiwan Conflict" *The Washington Quarterly* 25:4 (Autumn 2002), 77.

## Diplomatic

The perception of some adversaries is that the U.S. speaks softly, claims to carry a big stick, but does not have the will to use it. This statement questions the credibility of U.S. threats and undermines a key requirement of deterrence theory. The U.S. lost some of this credibility when it confirmed that Assad crossed the red line and used chemical weapons on his citizens, and then did nothing about it.<sup>13</sup> The U.S. has similarly diminished its credibility from a Russian perspective, as the U.S. is seen as having violated the sovereignty of several nations over the years, despite the legal basis used by the U.S. for these interventions. The important diplomatic actions needed, include calming real Russian fears that they will be the next nation invaded, either overtly or covertly, i.e. an assurance of Russian sovereignty. Additionally, The U.S., in conjunction with NATO, should assuage Russian security fears through a cessation of NATO expansion, while working to persuade Russia that the nature of their aggression is what is driving nations to pursue NATO membership. So, by continuing its aggression, Russia is actually defeating its own vital national security interests by pushing more nations towards joining NATO.

Diplomatic steps can focus on areas of mutual interest, as described in the review of Russia's NSS and Military Doctrine, to engage with Russia on the equal terms they desire; Anti-terrorism, transnational crime, humanitarian assistance, etc. There are numerous U.S. Strategic approach proposals that suggest isolating Russia on almost

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<sup>13</sup> Fisher, Max, "What is Obama's red line on chemical weapons and what happens if Syria crosses it?" *The Washington Post*, April 25, 2013.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/04/25/what-is-obamas-red-line-on-chemical-weapons-and-what-happens-if-syria-crosses-it/> (accessed October 20, 2015).

every diplomatic front, to include reviewing all U.S. interagency exchanges with Russia and working to remove or suspend Russia from participating in many international organizations.<sup>14</sup> However, these proposals to isolate Russia internationally would be counterproductive at this juncture and an unacceptable course of action to our European allies. International isolation would eliminate opportunities to strengthen regional interconnectedness of economies and could lead to military confrontations that, unlike the Cuban Missile Crisis, would then lack a diplomatic outlet to avoid escalation. It is also counterproductive for the U.S. to avoid its leadership role in the ongoing multilateral discussions seeking to solve the conflict in Ukraine. Additionally, the U.S. should remain an active leader in finding long term solutions for Syria. The U.S. should leverage Russian involvement in Syrian talks to start a dialog on Ukrainian solutions, as these two critical issues are important national interests for both nations involved. Reaching solutions in Syria should be understood as a first step towards normalizing the U.S./Russia relationship.

### **Informational**

Russia perceives a direct threat to its national sovereignty. The expansion of NATO to its borders, rhetoric against Putin's regime, and the regime's perception that westerns are meddling in Russian internal affairs are cause for their gravest concerns. Russia believes NATO's defensive reactions to the Crimea annexation, with increased forward military posturing and an increased exercise regime could be a prelude to a NATO invasion of Russia. The U.S. strategic messaging should emphasize the importance of borders and the sovereignty of all nations in Europe to include Moldova,

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<sup>14</sup> Carafano and others, "U.S. Comprehensive Strategy Toward Russia."

the Baltics, Poland, and Russia. The U.S. should also reopen and explore Russia's UN proposals for cyber norms. This is a topic that could further cooperation between the nations and should be explored through additional research.

## **Military**

While the diplomatic and information instruments seek to assure protection of Russia's core interests, the U.S. also needs to display a credible strength. It needs to reverse the perceived power vacuum created in Europe following the U.S. re-balance to the Pacific strategy. The NATO Wales Summit agreement that holds nations to their 2% military spending obligation is the right response, but since the agreement allows nations up to ten years to get there, it is not immediate enough.<sup>15</sup> The balance of power void, real or perceived, requires an immediate shift to cover the gap. The recent stop gap announcements by the U.S. to inject greater military power into Europe is a good first step, but falls short. The U.S. military presence in Europe has drawn down from its 300,000 personnel high during the Cold War to 35,000 troops.<sup>16</sup> The increase of equipment and rotational presence, that is being suggested for 2016, is merely a band aid fix compared to the steps that must be taken to provide a long term deterrent solution.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the U.S. should consider renewing the expansion of the European missile defense system, permanent forward basing of troops in Poland, and an increased naval presence and the creation of strategic basing closer to the Arctic. These are all prudent measures given the offensive threats emanating from not just Russia, but other states as

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<sup>15</sup> NATO, "Wales Summit Declaration" *NATO Press Release*, September 5, 2014. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm) (accessed January 4, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Judson Judson, Jen and Aaron Mehta, "US Army Pivots to Europe." *Defense News*, February 14, 2016. <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/land/weapons/2016/02/14/us-army-pivots-europe/80284042/> (accessed February 14, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

well, like Iran and even North Korea, when it comes to ballistic missile defense. The type of equipment and capability that should be re-introduced into Europe is a topic that could be further explored. The exploration would be wise to consider the destabilizing effect that purely offensive capability would have on the region. Russia is already fearful for its security and the introduction of too much offensive capability could lead to a security dilemma, where an arms race could further destabilize the region.

The projection of military power must be accompanied by a believable assurance that it is indeed defensive in nature and for the promotion of sovereignty of all nations, not just NATO. Additionally, the military power must focus on building NATO partner capacity and U.S. military to Russian military exchange. The exchanges and dialog should focus on common interests and concerns; international terrorism, transnational crime, and WMD proliferation. These actions should include an invitation for the Russian military to observe humanitarian assistance and counter-terrorism exercises as a first step. As exchanges and dialog grow, the U.S. could eventually seek to invite Russia to observe NATO defensive exercises and gain a U.S. or NATO invitation to similarly observe the Shanghai Cooperation Organization exercises. This military transparency and cooperation has been at the heart of why NATO has brought security to a European region that once fought wars between states for hundreds of years culminating with World War II.

### **Economic**

Both Russia and China seek an alternative vision of global governance and development, especially western backed economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Economic sanctions against Russia are pushing

them further towards that model and integration with the east instead of the west. In 2014, Russia signed a \$400 billion energy deal with China in an effort to pivot away from the EU. Additionally, indications are that the pain from the economic sanctions as felt in certain European countries is loosening the resolve of those imposing the sanctions since Europe used to get 30 percent of its natural gas from Russia.<sup>18</sup> With Europe highly reliant on Russia for energy and fairly well integrated with Russia's economy prior to the conflict, the sanctions will not be able to last much longer, and the U.S. and Europe will lose their leverage. Progress in Syria with the promise of reengagement on Ukraine could be the right carrot and stick approach to tie the loosening of sanctions to.

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<sup>18</sup> Carafano and others, "U.S. Comprehensive Strategy Toward Russia"

## **CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION**

Over the last decade, Russia's increased aggression towards its neighbors has raised fears for the continued stability of the European continent. Cyber attacks in Estonia, war against Georgia, the annexation of the Crimean peninsula, and the support to Ukraine's eastern rebellion and Assad's failing regime in Syria, are all actions consistent with Russia's undeterred pursuit of its national interests. As the chapter on Russian history and strategic culture revealed, aggressive expansionism has often gone hand in hand with the rise of strong autocratic Russian leaders. These leaders have often leveraged certain unifying identities, such as Christian Orthodoxy, Pan-Slavism, and Russian nationalism, as they seek to rally the Russian people's support in pursuit of security for the nation and as a means to suppress discontent in their pursuit of power. President Putin's rise to power and continuing grip over the nation only serves as a confirmation that Europeans have held false hopes for Russia to quickly become a liberal democracy and to integrate into the greater European Union.

Russia seeks its own course. As its strategic documents reveal, Putin does not want Russia to become yet another European Union or NATO nation, or a pawn to western dominated institutions, or worse, a lone outlier, as the nations on Russia's periphery join these institutions. He seeks to expand Russian influence over its former Soviet spheres through alternate international organizations and economic and military alliances. Instead of integrating Russia into western institutions, the growth of these institutions towards Russia's borders have caused Russia to act out of fear. This fear is a primal instinct rooted deeply in Russian strategic culture and in its continual quest for security from its perceived enemies. This quest often puts Russia at odds with the U.S.,

NATO, and the European Union. Russia's continued pursuits could lead it into additional conflicts with the U.S. and Europe over key issues like ethnic Russian populations throughout Eastern Europe, the growing interest in the Arctic access and resources, and the suppression of democracy in Russia.

In the chapter on deterrence theory, Christensen illuminated examples from the past where Russia has been successfully deterred from pursuing its objectives that were at odds with the U.S. His theory proposed that deterrence is effective only if a credible threat is accompanied by a credible assurance. This thesis elucidates that sovereignty and security are two of Russia's core national interests and that assuring these interests is what Russia values the most. The U.S. must be capable of both putting these interests at risk and assuring their protection, as a way to deter Russia from pursuing objectives that are counter to the U.S. interests.

Contemporary reactions to Russian aggression advance the notion that the U.S. and its NATO allies should diplomatically and economically isolate Russia while increasing the alliances' hard power projection to contain and deter further aggression. Yet, deterrence theory postulates, and history shows, that a pure application of military power, without the proper diplomatic outlets and assurances in place, could lead to an undesired escalation of conflict. Instead, by pursuing a strategic approach to Russia that blends deterrent strength, that a Realist nation understands, with the assurance of their core national interests, that they need, the U.S. and its European allies, could achieve greater stability and security for Europe.



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## **VITA**

LtCol Craig M. Nieman, joined Air Force ROTC and was commissioned into the USAF in San Antonio, Texas in May 1997. He was selected for Joint Undergraduate Navigator training Pensacola, Florida and F-15E Weapons Systems Officer training at Seymour Johnson AFB, North Carolina, graduating in Jun 2000. He has completed numerous F-15E operational and training flying assignments at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho and Seymour Johnson AFB, as well as a Joint Staff assignment at Yongsan, South Korea. He has completed two flying deployments in support of operations in southwest Asia and has been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal, amongst others. Craig has earned a Bachelor's degree in History from Trinity University, a Master Degree in Business from Trident University and is a graduate of Army Command and General Staff College. LtCol Nieman, just completed Command of Air Combat Command's Training Support Squadron, Langley AFB, Virginia. He is married to the former Jennifer "Gigi" Jordan of Garland Texas and they have four sons, Calvin, Isaac, Nicholas and Daniel; ages 13 to 7.